

God, Jews, and the Jewish New Year

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9/29/2016

Recall how the patriarch Abraham questioned God in His decision to destroy Sodom:

What if there should be fifty righteous people in the midst of the city? Would you still stamp it out rather than spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people within it? It would be sacrilege to You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the righteous along with the wicked; ... Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice? (Genesis 18:23-25.)



A God of reason

God permits Abraham to question Him. Can you imagine a Muslim questioning Allah?

Abraham's dialogue with God means that God is not only a God of justice, but also of reason.

This tells us what it means to be created in the image of God. It tells us that human society should be based on the primacy of speech and moral suasion as opposed to the primacy of force and coercion. It needs to be stressed, however, that Abraham's dialogue with God reveals the ultimate purpose of speech – Truth. Indeed, the Hebrew word for "truth," Emet, is one of the Names of God.

We also learn from Abraham's questioning of God that the God of the Jews, unlike the god worshiped by Muslims, is a God of freedom, a freedom that dwells with reason and kindness.

Going further, by telling us how Abraham spoke up and questioned the King of king's judgment regarding Sodom, the Bible of Israel is teaching us that we have a right to question the laws of any government, hence, that freedom of speech is a fundamental human right. However, this right must be understood from a Judaic perspective. The only rational justification for freedom of speech is man's creation in the image of G-d.

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Only because man is endowed with reason and free will does he possess a right to freedom of speech, which includes the right to question the policies of government. To be consistent with man's creation in the image of God, government must be based on the primacy of reason or persuasion, as opposed to the primacy of force or coercion. Only the former idea would be acceptable to the God of Abraham.

Function of speech

From Genesis we also learn that speech is not an end-in-itself or a mere exercise of self-expression. The basic function of speech is to communicate ideas about justice or the common good, or about what is true and what is false. To divorce speech from truth and justice is to reduce this distinctively human faculty to a mere instrument of self-aggrandizement. This is the tendency of normless democracy, which degrades man and makes nonsense of his

right to freedom of speech.

It cannot be said too often that if freedom of speech is divorced from truth and justice – a tendency of contemporary Liberalism–democracy is no more justifiable than tyranny. In other words, if there are no universally valid or objective standards as to how man should live, then there are no rational grounds for preferring democracy to tyranny. Immature minds contend, however, that moral relativism conduces to tolerance. But the moral relativism that permeates higher education in America undermines any objective ground for preferring tolerance to intolerance, democracy to tyranny. Is it not bizarre that left-wing academics tend to stifle freedom of speech, and even to identify with Islamic tyrannies vis-à-vis democratic Israel!

Morality and moral relativism

Some thoughtless intellectuals contend that moral relativism is a precondition of academic freedom. But academic freedom can have no justification unless it is commonly understood that it is wrong to cheat or plagiarize or steal or slander one's colleagues. This suggests that moral relativists, who very much dominate academia, take civilization for granted.

The father of civilization is none other than Abraham, whom the Torah refers to as the father of nations. The Torah portrays Abraham as the teacher of ethical and intellectual monotheism. Ethical and intellectual monotheism is rooted in the Genesis concept of man's creation in the image of God. This concept is the foundation for the moral unity of human nature, which negates racism and affirms the idea of the human community. We are indebted to Abraham for this idea.

The Bible of Israel thus contains the most rational foundation for the moral unity of human nature as well as the justification for freedom of speech. However, it makes no sense to speak of the moral unity of human nature unless freedom of speech has rational and ethical constraints. Without such constraints, freedom of speech is mere noise or mischievous nonsense. A lot of this nonsense has been generated by our colleges and universities during the past century, the heyday of moral relativism and what mistakenly passes for liberal education.

All the more reason for Americans to recur to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people and of ethical monotheism. Abraham is the true source of American Exceptionalism, the fondest hope of mankind. To all lovers of Israel and America, a Happy New Year! ☀